



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

ETHIOPIA

SUCCESS STORY

Parents Rethink Early Marriages

Outreach workers ask families to consider benefits of education



Lule Fetene (left) and Teferra Belay (right) are community-based reproductive health workers who want their children to live differently by avoiding an early marriage.

A USAID reproductive health program has already succeeded in preventing or annulling 1,783 early marriages in the East Gojjam area of Ethiopia.

Lule Fetene and Teferra Belay, both in their thirties, were each married when they were 14-years-old; their wives were even younger. Both became fathers before age 18, and now each has four children.

In Ethiopia's East Gojjam area, early marriage of boys and girls is a deep-rooted tradition that acts to balance debts and establish social and financial ties. Parents believe it will protect their daughters' honor by preventing out-of-wedlock sexual activity and pregnancy. Yet early marriage has many harmful consequences, such as extremely high fertility rates, poverty, complications such as fistulas due to early childbearing, increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, high rates of divorce, and the interruption of education.

A USAID program trained both men to provide reproductive health and family planning services and information to their communities. Early marriage, they say, is one of the greatest challenges they address among their peers. The program has prevented or annulled 1,783 early marriages in East Gojjam alone.

When they hear of an engagement, the men approach the parents to determine the bride's age. They counsel families to use the money intended for the wedding to keep their children in school instead. In their discussions with parents, the outreach workers also stress the lack of land and resources available to such young couples, who cannot improve their lives once burdened with many children. If the parents persist, they report the planned early marriage to the school director or to the Amhara Women's Association, who will bring the case to the district court.

Lule and Teferra each have 14-year-old daughters, both of whom are in school and are not engaged to be married. They plan on keeping them in school and encouraging them to get jobs to support themselves and their future families.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>